

Side Brown

Friday, Rickie Lee Jones plays the Keswick Theater in Glenside. Jones has a beautiful new album Pop Pop (Geffen) that finds her staking new ground by covering old ground -- namely pop classics and standards. Now this wouldn't usually be such a big deal since so many other singers have done it accompanied by a lot more hype and grandiose statements about how they loved these songs all along and now they're playing real music. But Jones does it with a difference. She makes the songs totally her own and the accompanying musicians, some of whom will be with her Friday create brilliant and unique arrangements on acoustic instruments mostly featuring guitar and bass with extremely subtle percussion and an occasional clarinet, saxophone or violin

Jones throws a few curves in by her choice of material which includes Jimi Hendrix's "Up From the Skies" and Marty Balin's "Comin' Back to Me." The other difference is the arrangements are all jazz -- but real jazz. Nothing is forced or phony and everything works with the material carefully selected so the whole album sustains a mood. It's a calming album, yet it draws you in, stirring the imagination with memories, dreams and fantasies. It's real soundtrack to life music and besides Jones' vocals which are particularly expressive whether scatting on Oscar Brown Jr.'s "Dat Dere" or getting deep into "I'll Be Seeing You," you could just get into following the bass lines of Charlie Haden and John Leftwich or Robben Ford's great nylon string guitar.

Jones' other gift is that she pulls this off without being camp or cute, a temptation that's affected too many other singers. The best evidence of this is "I Won't Grow Up," (yes the  
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song from Peter Pan) which has infinite possibilities for cuteness. On Pop Pop, Jones is very "hip" and I mean what that word meant about 30 years ago. Expect the same and better Friday.

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The Patsy Cline Collection (MCA) is an amazingly well-done set of four CDs containing 104 songs. Included is a booklet which details all the sessions, listing the players, and also serves as a fascinating history of Cline's tragic life and career. While Cline's music has been enjoying a deserved renaissance the last few years, it took her years to achieve success and actually only enjoyed it the last two years of her life. She was feisty and determined and fought her producer Owen Bradley all the way down the line and didn't want to record any of the songs that were her biggest hits such as "Walking After Midnight" and "I Fall to Pieces." Only after a near-fatal car crash the year before she was killed at age 29 in a plane crash, did she start to understand what Bradley was trying to do (record ballads that would cross over to pop) and realize her own potential.

The set is arranged chronologically starting with two 1954 radio transcriptions with the exception of the last track, a live recording of the hymn "Just a Closer Walk With Thee," where the only information known is that it was recorded at Ryman Auditorium (the original home of the Grand Ole Opry). From the very first track, "I'm Walking the Dog," Cline's power is evident and it stays with you through all four CDs. You don't want to turn it off.

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Though Cline's first allegiance was to country music, she wasn't a standard country singer. She belted the songs out and her phrasing was much closer to pop, but she transcended that too with undeniable emotion, conviction and heart. She literally put everything she had into just about every song she did. She was particularly great at singing Hank Williams songs. Williams was no slouch at conveying pain, but Cline is awesome especially on "Half As Much." As good as her early stuff is, the songs she recorded in the '60s are where she really nailed it down. By all accounts she was rarely less than confident, but the later recordings show a maturity and depth of delivery the early song only hint at.

As big as she was Cline could never afford her own band. At the time of her death, she was just starting to make the kind of money that would afford that luxury. In the studio though she used mostly the same musicians -- Nashville's best -- throughout her career. While some of the arrangements, especially the ones with strings, now seem dated and almost syrupy, Cline's singing easily rises above them.

Included are all her hits and several songs that mysteriously weren't such as "Two Cigarettes in an Ashtray," covered a couple of years ago by K.D. Lang. As with any great artist cut down in their prime, you can't help wondering what Cline would have done. The Patsy Cline Collection is worth whatever it costs.

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Brenda Lee has been around for so long it's hard to believe that next month she'll turn 47. But then she recorded her first song, Hank Williams' "Jambalaya" when she was 11, and

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sings with such grit and authority, literally growling out the words that it's hard to believe she was so young. That song and all her hits are available on the recent Brenda Lee Anthology (MCA). Though Lee has primarily recorded in Nashville and has always been on the fringes of country music, she isn't strictly a country singer. Early on she cited Edith Piaf as an influence, but she swings from country to rockabilly to ballads with startling ease.

The first CD features her songs from 1956-61 and includes "I'm Sorry" and "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree." Rockabilly fans will get off on "Little Jonah (Rock On Your Steel Guitar)" featuring masterful work from a young Buddy Emmons.

The second CD covers a large span of time from 1962 to 1980 and features moody, dramatic ballads often recorded with big arrangements such as "All Alone Am I." While the novelty of the young Lee is intriguing and was an obvious influence on many of the women rock singers of the '80s.

I can't put Brenda Lee in the same league as Patsy Cline, but she sings with unmistakable heart and this anthology is more than enjoyable and quite often a lot of fun.

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Back to rock 'n' roll, XYZ are playing the Tower Friday opening for Foreigner. Their new Capitol album is called Hungry and speaking of hungry, we now interrupt this column to bring you the first Other Side Thanksgiving Guide courtesy of Welcomat listings editor Jim Pierson who loves showing me ridiculous press releases when I'm feverishly trying to work. Everyone knows the best part of Thanksgiving is the stuffing and why bore your

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guests with gourmet yuppie stuffings when you can use White Castle hamburgers. That's right, Chris Thomas, White Castle's marketing director says, "Home chefs have enough to worry about, and our burgers include everything traditionally used in stuffing, bread meat and onions, and this is worry free and delicious." Just allow one White Castle burger minus the pickle (it doesn't mention the little castle box they come in) for each pound of turkey, tear the burgers into pieces, throw in celery, spices and chicken broth, toss it and stuff the turkey. White Castle would love to hear your comments.

If you're serving beans, cabbage, peas, eggplant or just about any other vegetable and worried about "social embarrassment simply put a bottle of Beano on the table next to the salt and pepper. Just add three to eight drops with the "offending food" and your worries will be over. Those who are truly gas prone will probably want to take a swig.

If you're too stuffed after the meal to bend, you might want to pick up the Original Seat Controller. This handy device from "Trendy Merchandise Specialist" guarantees you'll never have to bend down to lift a toilet seat again. Simply step on the handy pedal for two inches and up it goes, and when you leave, it automatically and quietly returns to the down position at adjustable speeds. "You'll never have to touch the seat again and there will be no midnight accidents." It's just \$29.95, call 1-800-Seat-Controller.

Finally, if you're falling asleep at the wheel on the way home, White Castle is serving free coffee. Um Good!

...Anyway XYZ are a pretty likeable metal band. Their lyrics are dumb, but not  
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offensive and singer Terry Ilous screams with the best of them while guitarist Mark Diglio plays soaring blues influenced lines. Standouts include "Shake Down the Walls" and "Don't Say No," and of course like all real metal bands they have a moving acoustic ballad, "When I Find Love."

British popsters ABC are back with the first studio album of the '90s *Abacadabra* (MCA). Actually this is pretty soulful for synth-pop and if you ignore the little quotes after the song titles like ...every problem has solutions... after "Answered Prayers," its moderately tolerable with "Spellbound" being reasonably listenable.